

Members assess ACRL

Results of the 2000 Membership Survey

by Melissa Cast and Shannon Cary

For an association to truly serve its members, it must constantly strive to be aware of the concerns and issues that its membership faces, as well as the values that guide their professional development.

Every three years, ACRL surveys a sampling of its members to assess the state of the association, ensure its membership is receiving high-quality services and programs, and track any new trends or needs. In order to increase input from members, the most recent survey conducted by Research USA, Inc. in the fall of 2000 was administered online.

The profession of academic librarianship is in a state of flux. In the last three years, challenges and opportunities never before imagined have had a great impact on academic libraries and librarians. Access to online materials and library services for distance learning are probably among the most prevalent of concerns, but by no means the only issues that today's academic librarian faces.

The results of this survey are instrumental not only in assessing the needs and wants of academic librarians, but also for planning new services and improving existing services in response to those needs.

Methodology

The sample size for the survey was 8,576 members. These names included all ACRL

members with known e-mail addresses. On October 3, 2000, all names were e-mailed an advance notice message, which informed them of the survey and requested their participation. On October 11, 2000, every name was e-mailed a cover letter from ACRL, which explained the importance of the survey and provided a link to the survey's Web site. Another request was sent by e-mail to non-respondents on October 30, 2000. All messages were signed by ACRL President Betsy Wilson. By November 27, 2000, there were 4,055 completed returns for a response rate of 47.3%. This is the highest response rate for the ACRL membership survey to date.

Results of the survey for the total membership are projectable within a range of 1.2% with a confidence level of 95%.

The questionnaire consisted of 33 questions under six headings which included: about ACRL; ACRL publications; ACRL and professional development, rating the association; about your work; demographic characteristics.

Key demographic findings

The typical ACRL member has not changed much from the last survey. An ACRL member is most likely Caucasian (88.9%), 48 years old, and has been a member of ACRL for 8 years. She most likely works in a university (45.2%) and in reference services (51%).

About the authors

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Technology, change, and customer service are key issues

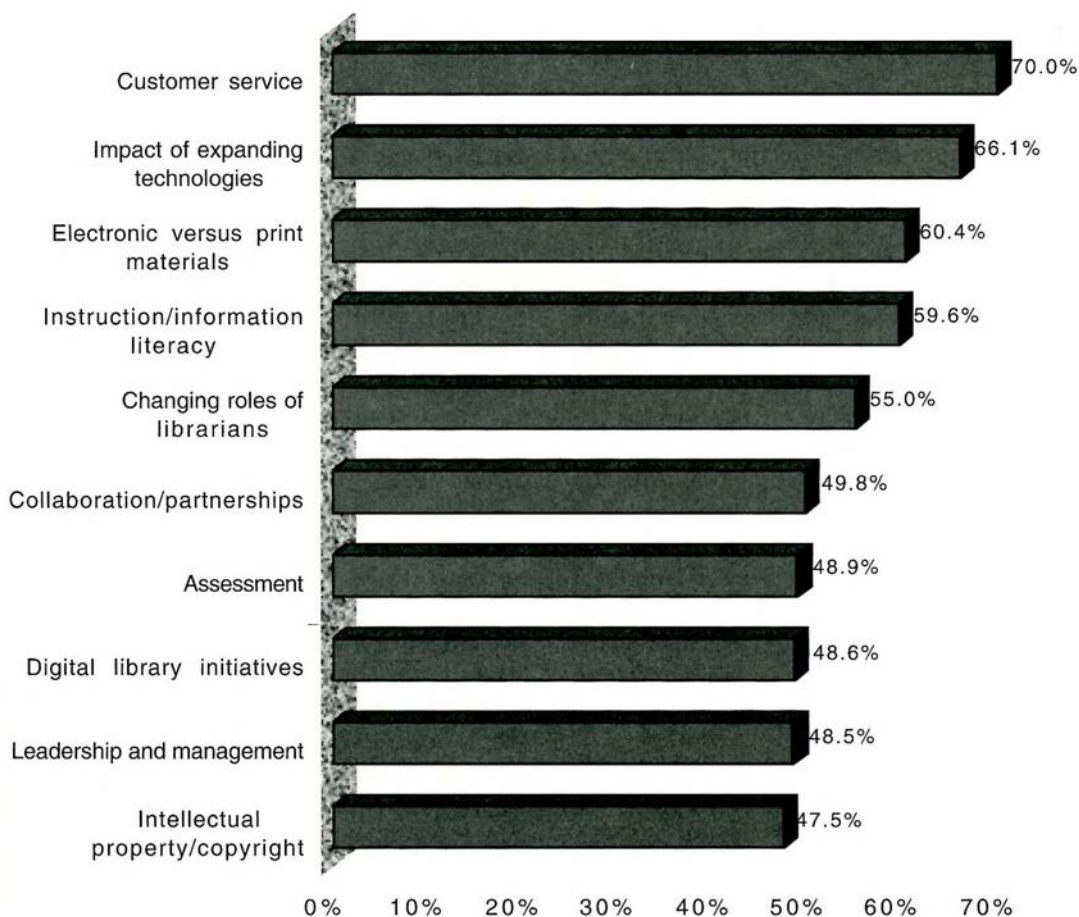
In the 1997 survey, close to 39% of respondents highlighted “technological change” as the most critical issue they face as librarians. In 2000, this issue is still in the forefront with 66% of the respondents rating the “impact of expanding technologies” as a “very important” issue to them in their jobs. The next three most highly rated issues were “customer service,” “electronic versus print materials,” and the “changing roles of librarians.”

Members interested in professional development

Throughout the survey, members expressed the importance of professional development. When asked to indicate the importance of each of these ACRL services, 64.6% of respondents rated “professional development”

as “very important,” with 91.9% responding that they also look to other library organizations for professional development. According to 41.1% of the respondents, “professional development opportunities” are “very important” in their decision to renew their ACRL membership. And “professional development/continuing education” was ranked second after “publications” as the program, activity, or service ACRL should continue above all others.

Although professional development is important to them, respondents are concerned about the cost of traveling to conferences and workshops. Of the respondents who had not attended the 1999 or 1997 ACRL National Conferences, 57.9% said that the “cost of travel and/or lodging” kept them from attending. Reflecting this concern, 25.5% of the respondents said that “distance learning” was the one pro-



Leading issues “very important” to members’ jobs.

gram, activity, or service ACRL should add. One respondent commented, "Though I have not attended because of the cost, this [ACRL National Conference] is widely considered to be the best academic-focused librarian conference. I look forward to the day when I can attend and take part in the sessions."

New directions for ACRL

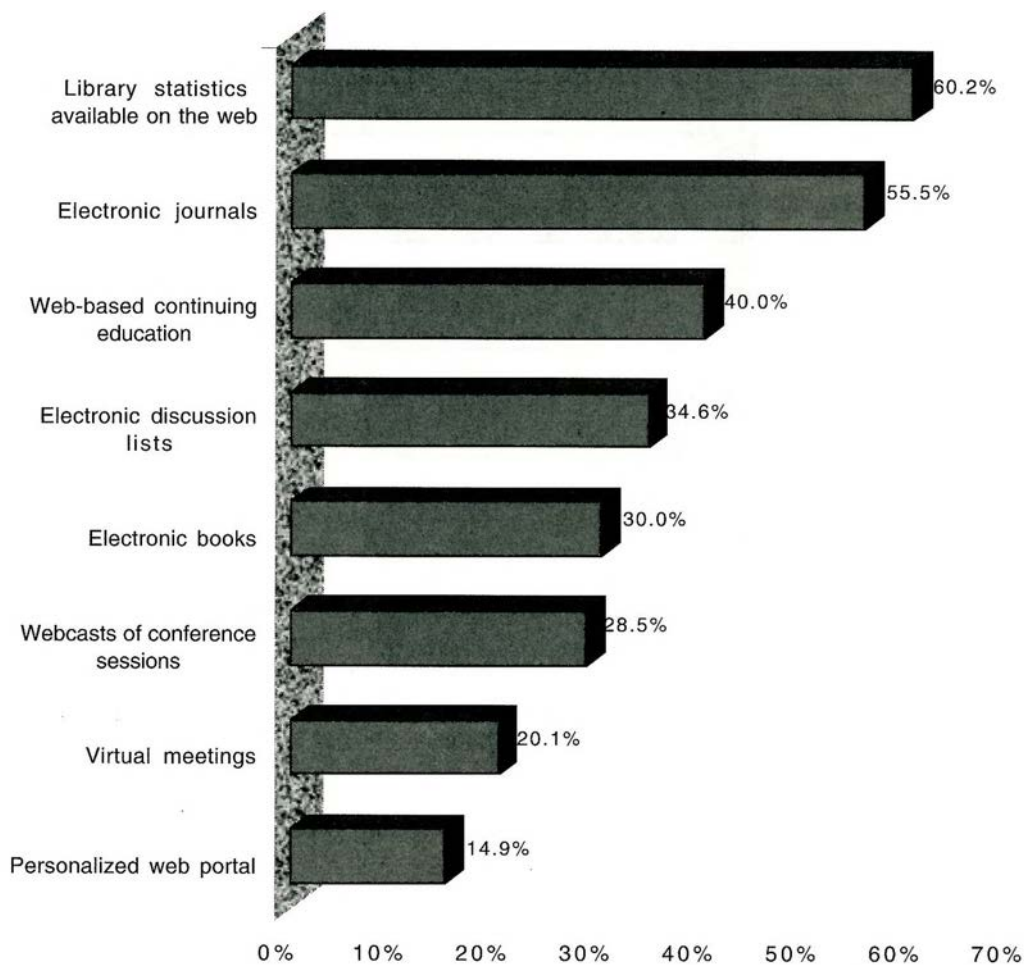
When members were asked to identify programs, activities, and services not currently being provided by ACRL that would be most beneficial to them, the responses strongly supported electronically based services and reaching out regionally and to other associations. The most popular choice of respondents was "distance learning" (25.5%). The next three most listed services were: "more chapter/regional activities" (7.5%), "e-journals/Web portal" (5.5%), and "joint programs

"I find the publications the most useful activity provided by ACRL."

with other organizations/ALA divisions" (3.2). One member stated, "I love the idea of virtual access to the ACRL Conference—a virtual site for vendor exhibits would be great—transcripts of programs, Web sites for program handouts or speakers Powerpoint presentations, etc."

Member participation

Members have continued to stay active in ACRL activities: 22.9% of respondents are members of a section committee, 21.6% are members of a discussion group, and 18% are members of an ACRL committee. These num-



Electronic programs in which members are "very interested."

Academic focus is still the most important reason for keeping an ACRL membership.

bers all represent slight increases from the 1997 survey.

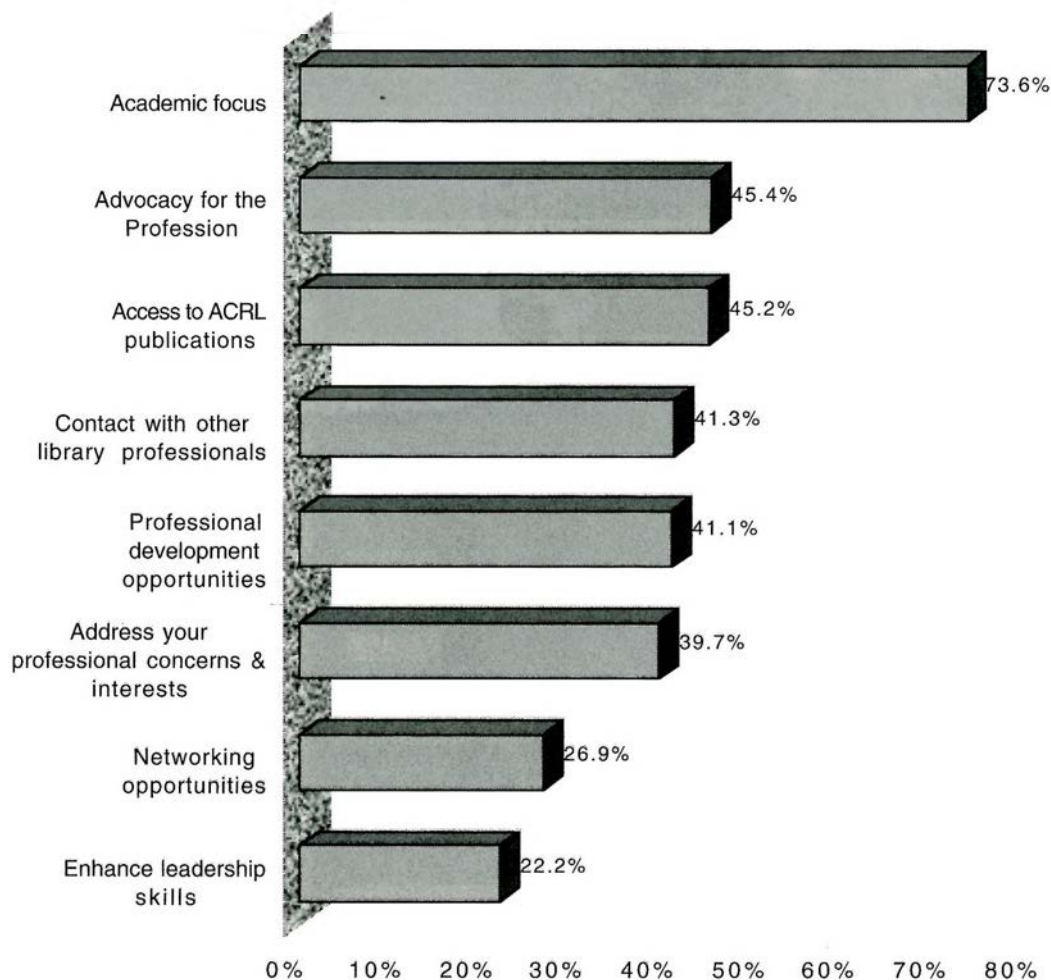
Members are also more active in sections with 76.5% belonging to a section as compared to 74.4% in 1997. The three largest sections represented among the respondents were the University Library Section (23.6%), the Instruction Section (23.1%), and the College Libraries Section (12.9%). The Instruction Section and the Community and Junior College Libraries Section have shown the largest percentage of growth in respondents since 1997. One respondent summed up the importance of sections by writing, "The section

activities should continue—they make ACRL more personal and relevant to my everyday work."

Our members have also remained active in their regional organizations: 50.8% of the respondents belong to their state library organization and 39.8% belong to their ACRL chapter. This also represents a slight increase from the 1997 survey.

ACRL as a virtual association

In an environment of rapidly expanding technology, many opportunities exist for ACRL to become a virtual association. ACRL members responded positively to the possible addition of electronic programs, products, and services, such as the 60.2% who indicated that they were "very interested" in "library statistics available on the Web," and the 55.5% who were "very interested" in "electronic journals." The concept of ACRL becoming more



Leading reasons "very important" for ACRL membership renewal.

of a virtual association was also a common thread in the comments on the survey. One member wants "As much information as possible disseminated through the Web site. It would be good to increase content and make it easier for members to collaborate on association initiatives."

Publications read regularly

Our members see ACRL publications as an invaluable service. An overwhelming 92.7% of respondents indicated that they read *College & Research Libraries News (C&RL News)* regularly, with 90.3% reading *College & Research Libraries (C&RL)* regularly. They also indicated that these publications are important in carrying out their jobs, "I really like *C&RL* and *C&RL News*—unlike most library journals available, these two journals always have articles I find useful," one member responded.

C&RL News and *C&RL* were seen as "very" or "somewhat useful" by more than 92.2% and 88.7% of respondents respectively. Respondents also expressed their approval by indicating that ACRL publications were important in their decision to renew their ACRL membership. And "publications" received the most responses (29.2%) when respondents were asked what programs, activities, or services ACRL should continue above all others.

As one member remarked, "At this stage, I find the publications the most useful activity provided by ACRL. Although I am active in a different national organization, the ACRL publications keep me abreast of trends and activities in a variety of academic libraries . . ."

In the 1997 survey, members demonstrated an interest in the continuation of the print form of the publications. Although this question was not repeated in the 2000 survey, 5.5% of members indicated that ACRL should add e-journals to its existing services. One respondent commented, "Continue to publish *C&RL* and *C&RL News*, but think about making them electronic publications with an archive."

Professional development must continue

In addition to publications, the second program, activity, or service that members feel

. . . respondents feel that the association is meeting many of their needs and that programs and services are valued.

ACRL should continue is professional development/continuing education opportunities. Among the comments members made regarding professional development, the ACRL National Conference stood out as an exemplary program. One respondent replied, "The National Conference is really wonderful. It is so much easier to get a full-packed day of useful sessions from it than from ALA, which has to cater to a much wider audience."

ACRL programming at ALA Annual Conference was highlighted, as well. One appreciative member felt that ACRL provides "excellent programming at ALA—you bring in outside speakers who contribute to my continuing education objectives!"

The #1 reason for membership

Academic focus is still the most important reason for keeping an ACRL membership. Listed as the most important reason in 1997 and in 2000, 73.6% of the respondents indicated that "academic focus" was a "very important" reason for renewing their membership.

"Advocacy for the profession" is also important as was reflected in the comment portion of the survey. One member stated, "The respect our profession gets varies widely from one institution to the next. The library as the heart of the university is a pleasant dream that is rarely reality."

Other activities that were rated highly according to importance as a reason for renewal were: "access to ACRL publications" and a place to "address your professional concerns and interests."

"*C&RL News* is one of the greatest and most useful benefits of ACRL membership, in addition to the opportunity to network, to meet and work with colleagues interested in the same areas I am. Sections are wonderful and should receive increased support . . ."

"The standards/competencies work is critical for library service and collections,

staff, and students. We must establish effective outcomes assessments."

Summing up

The success of an association is measured by the extent to which it meets the demands of its membership and strengthens the members' ability to provide superior library services at their institutions. Therefore, the member survey becomes one of our most important tools to gauge the extent to which our members' needs are being fulfilled.

"The only home for non-ARLs is really ACRL. [It provides] service to all college and university libraries, with emphasis on creating opportunities for the non-ARL."

The 2000 Membership Survey clearly indicated that ACRL's members consider information technology and its implications in academic libraries to be a constant issue that must be struggled with. In order to contend with a changing technological landscape, members want ACRL to continue to provide professional development activities that improve their ability to effectively use and apply technology. Members also expressed an interest in ACRL developing its virtual capabilities, especially in providing publications and continuing education on the Web.

ACRL is a vital organization for higher education and libraries because of its members. We are pleased that respondents feel that the association is meeting many of their needs and that programs and services are valued. ACRL will continue to track trends, assess the needs of the ACRL membership, and evaluate its programming so that we can continue to be responsive to membership with high-quality programs and services.

ACRL would also like to express its appreciation to the survey respondents who took time out of their busy schedules to complete this important assessment tool. The information gathered in the survey will be used by the ACRL Board of Directors, committees, sections, and chapters to review, update, and develop programs and products that meet the needs of our members.

The Board will continue to use the survey results in setting priorities and updating the Strategic Plan. ■

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- Nancy Kranich, ALA President

In line with our President's sentiments, the ALA filed suit in United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia on March 20, 2001.

ALA is partnering with state library associations, local libraries and library users to combat the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and protect intellectual freedom and equity of access. The funding necessary for this challenge is substantial. **Please help us make this landmark case for libraries and library users a success by contributing to the CIPA Legal Fund today.**

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